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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 003619

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [UN](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#)

SUBJECT: UNMEE OFFICIALS GIVE ADVICE FOR NEXT  
ETHIOPIA-ERITREA ENVOY

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3599

[B](#). ADDIS ABABA 3401

[C](#). ADDIS ABABA 3316

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: UNMEE Deputy Head Azouz Ennifar and his political aide told the Charge that any new UN envoy on the Ethiopia/Eritrea border issue should come to the parties with concrete proposals for resolving the conflict and avoid media attention during initial phases of his work. New economic and commercial arrangements could make a deal more attractive. The UNMEE officials also urged that any new envoy take advantage of their Mission's expertise on the border area and the political climate, and noted that former UN envoy Lloyd Axworthy had not done so. Ennifar indicated that active African Union (AU) involvement was not welcomed by either party. Ennifar wondered whether both sides were hurting badly enough to take difficult measures to break the stalemate; he recalled that, prior to the recent extension of the UNMEE mandate, UN officials in New York had considered cutting UNMEE back severely in an effort to create incentives for the two countries to move forward. The UNMEE deputy believed that if there were political instability in Ethiopia, the risk of a military attack from Eritrea would increase. He speculated that Eritrea's strategy would be to quickly seize key areas, including Badme, then count on rapid international intervention to freeze the new status quo. PM Meles, for his part, seems not to be worried saying "Isaias doesn't want to die." He also does not see any drawn out political violence. Chief of Staff General Samora told Charge and DAO separately that the "tripwire" for an Eritrean military attack would be the removal of UNMEE. Samora considered such an attack unlikely, however, given that Eritrea (like Ethiopia) had a good harvest; Eritrean sorties are in the field not on the front lines, he said. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge and PE Counselor met Sept. 27 with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Azouz Ennifar, who serves as the Deputy Head of the UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE), and his senior political advisor, Abdel-Kader Haireche, to seek their views concerning the possible naming of a new UN envoy on the border conflict. Ennifar took up his post in Addis in August, while Haireche has worked with UNMEE for over four years.

Axworthy's Missteps: Too Much Talk, Too Little Listening  
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[1](#)3. (C) When asked what a potential new border envoy could learn from the experience of former UN Special Representative Lloyd Axworthy, both officials pointed to the ill-conceived interview that Axworthy gave during his first visit to Addis Ababa. According to Haireche, Axworthy talked excessively in the interview about "his ability to open doors and make things happen." The former minister's bravado seemed to alienate the Eritrean side in particular, as did Axworthy's very public initial visit to Addis, rather than Asmara. Perhaps as a result of this initial misstep, President Isaias never agreed to receive Axworthy. The lessons for a future envoy, both officials agreed, were to take a low public profile initially and to go to Asmara first, where insecurity and mistrust were greater. Ennifar recommended that any envoy on the border issue move quietly, "like the Oslo Mideast peace process," in order to avoid public pressure, posturing and unrealistic expectations.

[1](#)4. (C) Haireche also noted with some irony that Axworthy began his mission on the border conflict without ever consulting experts at the UNMEE mission. In so doing, he ignored a wealth of military and political expertise that the staff had accumulated over several years of detailed work on the issue. UNMEE head Joseph Legwaila had been forced to "chase Axworthy around" just in order to stay in the loop about what he was doing. The two senior officials disagreed on a number of issues and did not get along well. Haireche added that the UN officials in New York had also failed to consult internally before naming Axworthy, who in turn never touched base with the diplomatic community, at least not in Addis. The lesson Haireche underscored was that an extensive body of knowledge and experience concerning the border issue exists at the UN and among diplomats in the region, and a

future envoy would be well advised to tap into it.

#### Needed: Fresh Ideas

15. (C) Amb. Ennifar told the Charge that any new border envoy must come with new ideas. An increased focus on economic issues was one of the most promising fresh approaches, he said. For example, the port of Djibouti was not working well for Ethiopia and gaining new maritime commercial options would be appealing to the landlocked country. Haireche remarked that Ethiopia seemed to be building up the importance of Badme as a bargaining chip, perhaps in order to cede it eventually in return for internationally guaranteed access to the Eritrean port of Asaab. Ennifar recalled that in response to a bellicose Eritrean speech the week before, Ethiopian FM Seyoum had offered a fairly measured response that focused on economic issues.

16. (C) He also reported that PM Meles had told a group of Eritrean opposition leaders recently that he would be willing to give up heavily-disputed Badme if it would ensure border demarcation and sustainable peace. Haireche added that although some Ethiopian veterans opposed turning Badme over to Eritrea after so much blood was spilled to recapture it, veterans groups were not very well organized and did not appear to represent a real constraint on the PM's flexibility. On the other hand, Ennifar noted that Ethiopia's opposition parties still officially opposed Eritrean independence and were little inclined to compromise on the border. For this reason, Meles would need international help to sell whatever deal emerged to his domestic audience. Amb. Ennifar suggested that contact with the Secretary of State at the right time, for example, might be necessary. (Note: Berhanu Nega, a prominent moderate in Ethiopia's principal opposition party, told the Charge subsequently that opposition would not try to roll back Eritrean independence as such, but did need better sea access for maritime trade.)

#### Is Timing Right for a Solution?

17. (C) Unlike his boss Joseph Legwaila (see ref C), Ennifar wondered whether both sides were hurting badly enough to take difficult measures to break the stalemate. He recalled that, prior to the recent extension of the UNMEE mandate, UN officials in New York had considered cutting UNMEE back severely in an effort to create incentives for the two countries to move forward, but in the end the UNSC was reluctant to take such a step now.

18. (C) Both Ennifar and Haireche agreed that the Ethiopian government would not be prepared to move ahead on the border issue until it felt that it had its internal political situation under control. Ennifar, however, expressed confidence that the election dispute that has bedeviled PM Meles for several months would soon be over.

#### Will Eritrea Strike While Meles is Weak?

19. (C) Both Ennifar and Haireche agreed that if Ethiopia's internal political situation worsened substantially, the chances of an Eritrean attack would grow. UNMEE's political advisor said that Eritrea had the military capacity to strike quickly and seize key points, such as Badme, but could not hold them against an Ethiopian counterattack. Isaias' strategy, therefore, would likely be to take what he wanted, then work for immediate international community intervention to freeze the new status quo, possibly backed up by the findings of the UN's Ethiopia/Eritrea Boundary Commission.

10. (C) PM Meles for his part seems not to be worried. He told the Charge and AF DAS Yamamoto (Ref A) that "Isaias doesn't want to die." He also does not see any drawn out political violence. Chief of Staff General Samora told Charge and DAO (septel) that the "tripwire" for an Eritrean military attack would be the removal of UNMEE. Samora considered such an attack unlikely, however, given that Eritrea (like Ethiopia) had a good harvest; Eritrean sorties are in the field not on the front lines, he said.

#### Probing for U.S. Intentions

10. (C) Haireche indicated that some of his contacts, including those in both governments, were trying to determine where the U.S. stood on the border issue now. He asked whether the State and Defense Departments had the same view on how to handle the problem. He speculated that DoD had a different agenda than State and other agencies in Eritrea, where it had strategic interests the took precedence over other concerns. Haireche also remarked the Ethiopian Government blamed State officials for short-circuiting the GOE's five point peace plan in late 2004 and continued to be wary of their involvement on the border issue.

HUDDLESTON